Gerhard K. Eichweber

Design:
Approach, Profession, Professionalism & Service of Relevance for Societies and their Economies

Abstract:

This perspective upon Design starts with its definition and its relevance for society:
Beyond the often verbally affirmed, however hardly practically supported general importance of "culture" for society – and in contradiction of the ubiquitous, however diffuse and in most cases counterproductive assumption, that Design has anything to do with "Art" or "Taste" – it is important to understand, what Design in its entire scope, is about: Artefacts fulfilling criteria. And how Design is of crucial importance for Society – and for an Economy serving society – with innovations as offers specifically serving humanity in its diversity of values and preferences. The definition of Design as giving Gestalt, Meaning and Raison d'Être to Artefacts, in line with Human Needs, Society and Environment" not only describes the scope of Design, but also leeds over to the explanation, how Design needs to be understood in all its potentials as a methodical approach to optimising all artefacts. All human actions and abstentions of action. While it appears beneficial for everybody to know and be conscientious about this in all situations, it appears of utmost importance, that leaders in industries and other businesses as well as public administrations and politics, understand Design as a Tool for far better results in the achievements of vital goals. This obviously has consequences for requirements regarding education of everybody, but, moreover, of potential leaders from all professions, and of the professionals assisting these in accordance with their qualitative briefings: the "Designers".
The Paper outlines further, how education better starts from the most difficult cases, such as Design and, moreover, Corporate Design, for industrial goods, moreover with investment goods of individual solutions and extremely short series. Because, who can give these a common "Gestalt-Language", will also be able to do it with mass-produced durable and consumer goods. In the process, the aspects of "Brand Techniques", as established by Hans Domizlaff and further developed by Benno von Keysselitz and, last, not least, Value Design, provides the concept and the methodology leading to lasting sustainable maximum success.
Furthermore the paper resumes arguments regarding the most appropriate ways of promotion of Design, as part of promoting economy and prosperity, also through promotion of innovation and technologies, as successfully exemplified especially in the case of the turn around of the Spanish Basque Country. A success story nowadays referred to as "Bilbao Effect".

Key Words:

Identity, Design, Gestalt, Perception, Artefact, Artifact, Economy, Society, Human Factors, Ergonomy, Education, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Values, Qualitative, Diversity, Distinction, Corporate, Culture, Management Tool, Ergonomy, Software, Hardware.

Introduction: Design – Infra-Utilised ?
Design can be seen as the the single most effective Management-Tool for lasting Success.

Since its beginnings at the Bauhaus and, moreover, since "Ulm" (since the establishment of the "Hochschule für Gestaltung" or "HfG", Ulm) Design is "*menschen- und gesellschaftsgerechte Gestaltung aller Dinge, vom Löffel bis zur Stadt*", thus:: "*giving Gestalt to Artefacts adapted to human beings and in line with society and environment*". The "*environment*", initially implied, was explicitly added in the seventies, This concept, base of leading teaching around the world, in our days is less visible. Already since far too long, there is less "leading teaching". A lack to be corrected in order to prevent further damage. Where things go wrong, it appears to be simple, yet of little use, to blame anyone for the counterproductive development. But efforts to correct the flaws may not lead to lasting improvement, if one does not also openly discuss the roots of the problems, in order to eliminate these roots.
It appears worth taking a close look on what has happened when and where, and how this has influenced the view, how we look at artefacts today. And at the way, artefacts are conceived. This also refers to an earlier paper, presented in 1999 at the Semiotic Conference in Dresden: "Education – For What?" outlining options to improve education and instigate discussion with regard to education in line with the renewal of a culture of questioning paradigms and developing independence of thought at its roots: Broad knowledge as a prerequisite of real competence. Beyond the narrower scope of "Design" as a profession and a service, it is important to clarify, what Leaders in industry and society must know, in order to use design to its fullest, in order to achieve lasting success.

In order to be used as an additional and extremely powerful management tool, Design or, with other words, precise qualitative specification of distinction, must be understood by entrepreneurs and managers alike, as one of their most important tasks and duties, starting with doing their own homework of conceptual thought before briefing others with qualitative information leading to uniqueness precisely fitting preferences of distinct target groups – and thus defining their own identity and generating identification with their brands and offers.

In the business world, the abbreviation "USP" is used as an ever repeated term.
But few understand its precise meaning. And less turn this meaning from potential to reality by fully applying its meaning. Namely the meaning of the U and the P, as both nurture the S. As often reiterated, Uniqueness – the U – is a must. Otherwise there is no real "*raison d'être*". For no artefact: Neither for a firm or organisation. Nor for its offers, products, services. And, as also reiterated, the concept of P = Proposition refers to an, if not "*tlc*" = "*tender loving and caring*" so at least "*benevolent*" interest in others, namely in customers and end-users, but also in vendors, distributors and, last, not least, employees. The P in USP, thus, is the link to the "*love of next of kin*" which does in fact have - or require - a firm place in entrepreneurship and management, in order to be utterly successful. Just that the concept of "*loving the other just as much as one loves oneself*" requires self-love, too. A prerequisite of success seen in dealing with one's own identity, brand, offers: Without applying due thought to continuously enhancing the qualitative distinction of one's own reason to exist, and that of one's offers, how will one be able to understand, distinguish, appreciate and truly support the identities, cultures, values and preferences of others, such as users, customers, vendors, sales partners? And how will this be able to reflect in one's interest in employees and their standing united as one organisation, filling its high goals regarding corporate identity, corporate culture with life every day, in the way they deal with third parties in serving their best interests better than others? Applying this to entrepreneurship, marketing and design was the key-concept behind the so called Bilbao effect.

Design, a Management Tool – and Design Promotion at the Centre of Developing Economy
Turning Design Promotion into a solid part of promoting economy and its development in the Spanish Basque Country extremely suffering from economic crisis, was a wonderful idea of Basque politicians, when making first steps into autonomy after Spain's liberation from fascism. Euskadi, the Basque Country, together with parts of Asturias being the most important heavy industry region, not only of Spain, but of Southern Europe, the concept of Design Promotion could not follow the superficial and often artsy and self-centred concepts of Design Centres promoting "Design" with a narrow limited vision often defined by those "Designers" who were unable to serve industry well – even regarding consumer goods and other mass produced items, let alone investment goods of small series and individual one off types.

Thus, a "heavy-duty" understanding of Design, stemming from high tech and machinery design was as much required as its methodology of optimising function, costs and qualitative distinction as a whole. Such holistic approaches not only require a "tool-box" of shrewdly optimised, yet flexible methodology and techniques, but multidiscipline processes and the preparation for these. Such preparation, starting form the top of all organisations and separately preparing external specialists as service providers, in order to be able to work together based on the same understanding and avoiding unnecessary friction, just as in Bilbao, needs to be realised as a central part of all efforts aimed at lasting sustainable change and reconversion of any economy. Moreover, training future professionals in the most elementary and at the same time difficult cases of Design and Corporate Design, specifying and expressing meaning as distinction of all artefacts, before allowing them to deal with mass produced items as the much simpler cases, certainly would be the best move possible in order to change the understanding of design and its power as a management tool.

Thoughts about Correcting Design Education, for Design via Industry serving Society better by leading to Artefacts serving specific qualitatively distinct Target Groups better by overcoming lacks of own specific Reasons to Exist – these thoughts must not halt at Design education, but influence all education. First of all, it must address the ability of dealing with qualitative distinction: Sensing and understanding, describing and specifying and finally implementing, realising and communicating in the right manner to distinct target groups.

Correcting Design Education but not only "Design" Education at the Roots of the Misleading Paradigms hurting all Societies through continuously building Crisis has to start with understanding both the deeper roots of the crisis and the potentials of design as well as where both overlap: Industry and, moreover: Economy. Real Economy. Economy is the Sum of all Transactions realised based on the degree of satisfaction of the preferences of diverse target groups. The degree of satisfaction results in value = price and number of the transactions.

Diversity is the key to all sustainable, lasting success. Thus, diversity is the key to rewarding employment and prosperity for all. Diversity is natural. The equal right of being different is a key.

Egalitarian approaches, reducing all to numbers without understanding where the number come from, instead, is not only not human and inhumane, but counterproductive to the best interests of any individual, group, region, state and continent. And Design is the tool to overcome the prevailing paradigms blocking success and self realisation as much as independence and self determination of states. Diversity is not disturbing but enchanting and freeing people for their own happiness. Diversity is also the reason for interest in others, and, thus, for benevolence: Mutual love of next of kin, just as much as of self love based on one's own distinction.

Entrepreneurship, Design and assisting Professions

As many believe to know about design, but in their sum represent very fuzzy ideas about design which one also could regard as "cacophony", it appears beneficial to return to "zero", starting from the Definitions: If Design is about the definition of all Artefacts in accordance with mankind and environment, and if Entrepreneurship concerns the conception, realisation and offer of Artefacts uniquely meeting and serving preferences of specific groups of natural and legal persons, and, moreover, if Designers by profession are to assist Entrepreneurs in the conception of Artefacts and by giving and expressing meaning of Artefacts through Gestalt and the experience of the very Being – the identity – of Artefacts, while engineers assist in the realisation and optimising of function productivity and cost of Artefacts, and while economists are to assist all in the calculation of quantitative results as far as measurable in money: What is required from the different professions as functions in society as well as in the different organisational bodies of any society, which by definition, too, are Artefacts? And how must these and all other Artefacts be? Moreover: How must Education of entrepreneurs, designers, engineers as well as economists be planned and realised, in order to respond to the above glimpses on definitions in the best possible way? And how far is the gap of current educational concepts, programmes and offers from correctly corresponding to such vital requirements?

The fact, that companies, once leading through distinction, thus, Design, like Olivetti, no longer exist, is closely related to the lack of idoneous preparation and professionalism of the designers. Designers not fitting the challenges at hand can not help, or, worse, only mislead their clients. But they can only do lasting damage, if the other professionals involved in the processes and the leadership of the respective organisations, too, lack the competence to recognise the problems and cure these. In the case of machinery, there is a natural filter preventing the worst: Heavy Industry lacks the attraction and "flair" to attract superficial artsy non-professionals of Design.

In volume-production areas of durable goods like office equipment, the risks at stake have proven to be much greater – and more vital. And here the relatively quick transition of primary factors specifying the nature of an Artefact, from Hardware (*mechanisms, wheels, etc.*) to Software (*screens and their content*) not only has enlarged the concept of ergonomy (*or, in US terms: "human factors"*) into the area of software-ergonomy, best exemplified by Apple's "Mac" user interface soon illicitly but inevitably copied by Plagiarisers like Microsoft and, later, Samsung. In the case of Olivetti, so far leading in Design thanks to Professionals like Mario Bellini, the inability of Designers educated as architects, to serve and assist the engineers and the management in coping with the new challenges has lead to disaster.

In principle, the task had become more easy than before. But the changed boundary conditions, reduced to maximum freedom as far as mechanical constraints but requiring new deep thought as far as a new language of Gestalt to give easily understandable meaning to displays and controls, has been too much for those in charge. Thus, the engineers and their new additional counterparts, software-writers, in principle were left alone and did it in their way…

Instead of seeing the human interface between man and artefact as the only remaining constraint, and, thus, as a push towards fully focusing on the questions of Meaning, of Being, the Designers involved escaped from their mental overload into mental masturbation:

They invented "Memphis" and sought refuge and justification in philosophical blur about the now present "Post-Modernism". And many a more writing than ever "designing" colleague joint their ranks and files, proclaiming post modernism in many a way as the new fashion once and forever substituting, even "overcoming" the "past" concept of industrial design.

As a trendy business, substituting the thus destroyed italian industrial clients once and forever, it certainly has provided both income and fame. A fame now still capitalised upon, even if the private confession, in front of my fire place, of this "*coping strategy*" in my more pointed terms as "*intelligent mental masturbation*" by now may not be kept that much in private anymore.

The result of such ill developments on "the world", through artefacts forcing humans to follow the logic of software nerds much more than intuitive ergonomy and implicit semiotics, by now is more than visible. And the rapid progress of better software ergonomy after the return of Apple-founder Steven Jobs to the helm of the "sinking ship", which before had been the one and only leader turning around the computer industry, and making it and incredible new functions available to more businesses and individuals, can not entirely make up for the damage. Moreover, it can not correct the damage done to jobs lost in Italy and Europe.

Here the undersigned of this paper is not without criticism of his own and his peer's failing to fulfill their duties: As board members of the German Industrial Designers Association VDID they should have assisted their colleagues to overcome their inability to cope with the new challenges and to continue to assist their industrial clients with outstanding solutions also as far as the design of now software-based human interfaces. But it would not have changed anything about the fate of once far shining Olivetti. Too far infested was this organisation by the network of those designers more occupied with their own egos and doubtful fames, and too much were the italian design periodicals in their hands, mutually promoting each others by writing about each others, to get through with a warning to the top management under De Benedetti.
At least this was the prevailing paradigm. A prejudice detaining those who saw it coming from making any effort. Too high also was the involvement in a growing overload of tasks entrusted to them, because entrepreneurs had found that no one else could cope with them.
Now, what who can learn from this glimpse into the history of design and designers partially not serving its clients and purpose, is to be seen. It is however a hint also on the ill concepts currently in many places "taught" as "design education": Art, Furniture and Shampoo packaging. Artsy "Styling" rather than design. Sobriety is required to see the flaws and eradicate them.

Now, how can Design be of better service to industry and society, and in a quick turnaround?
Like in promoting "Different is better" to the Basque Industry from Bilbao's "Design Centre", thus right away turned into a "Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation", even if this name was adopted only much later and after some political changes, here, too, entrepreneurs should be the primary target group. They not only can understand fast, but can react immediately.
If they return to understand their role as leaders in specifying what is different about their company and its offers, and how this difference should transcend from the specific "Being" of their offers and corporate culture into tangible difference valued by their specific target groups, they will brief all their internal and external staff and service providers, including designers, in precise qualitative terms about their objectives. And this will put the required orientation and demand on all involved. Namely it will specify better, what designers (and design education, but also the professional education of engineers and economists) have to fulfil.
And thus entrepreneurs and top managements will apply their soberly reflected vision required as basis for stable continuity, before they share these with their staff in order to fill the thus continuously refined identities of their firms with life, which makes the difference tangible.
It is the customer experience, which forges the identities and the appreciation of brands.
Only thus can a strong identification of target groups with a brand be expected, created and nurtured. It is the proactive "Design" of a specific "image of the other" created as public image, and its congruency with the organisation's self image, which is the most prominent task of any leadership. A task not to be delegated. But a task into which, as an inclusive process, all members of an organisation can and should be integrated. Both to enrich the results and to create the necessary cohesiveness of all actions – and abstentions from action.
Design as management tool regards all artefacts, not just from leafs of paper and their content to products, factories and showrooms, but from ideas and projects to the impact on society.